



## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PROPER SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE, HAULING AND DISPOSAL

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# UNDERSTAND AND TAKE CARE OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

IF YOU BUY A HOME OR  
A BUSINESS THAT HAS A  
SEPTIC SYSTEM, YOU ARE  
RESPONSIBLE FOR  
MAINTAINING THAT SYSTEM.



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If your business or home is not connected to a sanitary sewer, you probably have a septic system to handle your waste. To work, your septic system needs to be properly designed for the size of your household and/or type of your business, properly installed, and adequately maintained.

By taking care of your septic system, you can save money and protect the environment.



# LETTING YOUR SYSTEM FAIL CAN BE SERIOUS!

*Household septic tanks and cesspools constitute the single largest source of ground water contamination in the state, according to the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission.*

Failing septic systems can contaminate ground water. Contaminated ground water can cause a variety of bacterial, parasitic and viral diseases (some life-threatening) in humans and animals, including, but not limited to:

**Campylobacteriosis** - causes diarrhea in humans.

**Giardiasis** – causes abdominal pain, diarrhea, headache, nausea and vomiting

**Melioidosis** – causes fever, bone and joint pain and coughing

**Salmonellosis** - causes fever, muscle aches, headache, vomiting and diarrhea.

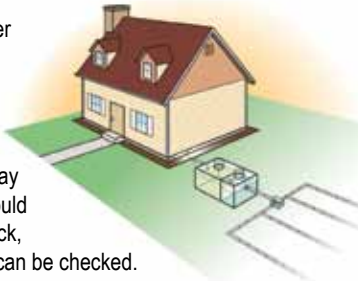
**Toxocariasis** - can potentially cause vision loss, a rash, fever, or a cough.

**Toxoplasmosis** - can cause birth defects if a woman becomes infected during pregnancy and can also be a problem for people with depressed immune systems.

## HOW A SEPTIC SYSTEM WORKS

A septic tank is a watertight box, usually made of precast concrete, concrete blocks or reinforced fiberglass. Household waste enters the septic tank through an inlet pipe from the home, and several things happen:

- Organic, solid material floats to the surface and forms a layer of “scum.” Bacteria in the septic tank use natural processes to break down these materials.
- Organic products created by bacteria digesting the waste sink to the bottom of the tank and form a layer of “sludge.”
- Between the scum and sludge layers, clearer water should exist. *Only* this clearer water should overflow to the outlet pipe and into the area where it can be absorbed by soil, called a drain field.
- The drain field is located away from the septic tank and should include gravel or crushed rock, and an inspection port so it can be checked.



If the solid material in the scum or sludge builds up and overflows into the drain field, it can clog the system. Two main reasons that solid material builds up are:

- Not enough bacteria to digest the solid material; and
- Not having the sludge removed.

## KEEP SEPTIC SYSTEM BACTERIA WORKING

Your household waste should have enough bacteria to digest the solids unless the bacteria are harmed. Check the labels of products you usually use to make sure they won't hurt the bacteria. Products that have warnings such as “harmful or fatal if swallowed” will harm bacteria, too.

Some products, even when used according to directions, can reduce the amount of bacteria in your septic system. These products include detergents, bleaches, acids, household kitchen and bath cleaners, furniture polishes, and drain openers. Try to use environmentally friendly versions of these types of products whenever possible.

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

- **Don't overload your system** – check faucets and toilets for leaks and repair if needed; use aerators on faucets and flow reducer nozzles on showers to use less water; wait until your dishwasher is full to run it; consider installing low-flow, high-efficiency toilets if you don't already have them; and reduce water levels for smaller laundry loads.
- **Be careful about what you flush down your toilet** – do not flush cat litter (even if it says flushable on the label), disposable diapers, sanitary napkins and tampons, paper towels, facial tissues, coffee grounds or cigarette butts and filters. All of these things can clog your septic system.

## REMOVE SLUDGE REGULARLY

The sludge in your septic tank cannot be broken down by bacteria and will not break down on its own. If not removed, it will build up until it eventually overflows, clogging your system. Make plans to have your sludge pumped out of your septic system every few years, based on the size of your system, number of people living in your home or amount and type of business you do, and the age and condition of your system.

When your septic system does need to be pumped out, you have the right to know where the septic system waste is being disposed of. ***Be sure to use a company that has a permit to dispose of septic waste and that commits to dispose of the waste responsibly. Also make sure the company pumps out both sides of your tank.*** Ask the company to provide the following information:

1. How much septage was pumped out of your system;
2. Where and when it is being disposed of; and
3. When follow-up maintenance is recommended.

If your septic system is in good condition and you take care of it, you will be able to count on it for many years. ***Remember to have it inspected if you have any doubt, maintain it properly and use it only for the materials and waste for which it is intended.***